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SUBJECT: CHILE'S LEFTIST PARTIES HAVE CONGRESSIONAL DREAMS

REF: A) Santiago 432
B) Santiago 391

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Several minor leftist political parties without seats in either the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies continue to seek their own path to greater representation in the upcoming national elections. A coalition of three leftist parties have joined together under the banner of a single presidential candidate, Jorge Arrate, to represent their platforms. Minor party candidates are not serious contenders for the presidency but are likely to siphon some support from the Concertacion candidate, Eduardo Frei, triggering a runoff election. End Summary.

Leftist Political Parties Seek Congressional Representation

12. (U) Three small -- but electorally significant -- leftist parties joined forces under the slogan "Juntos Podemos Mas," Together We Can Do More (abbreviated JP in Spanish) in 2003. The coalition remains in place today and these parties, the Communist Party (PC), the Humanist Party (PH), and the Christian Left Party (IC), believe that by acting together they can gain more leverage in their quest to gain representation in the legislative branch.

13. (U) Since the end of the Pinochet era, the left has had a strained relationship with the Concertacion. While the JP parties were members of the first Concertacion coalition that supported President Aylwin's candidacy in 1989 (there were 17 parties then), the Communists deserted the Concertacion early on, in 1991, taking the role of "opposition on the left." The JP coalition expanded that leftist opposition into a coalition by bringing the Humanists and Cristian Left together with the Communists. Despite running their own list for congressional seats, JP has not been able to elect even one deputy under the binomial system.

14. (U) For the last several weeks, Junto Podemos has been in negotiations with the governing center-left Concertacion coalition in a bid to gain parliamentary representation, but an accord still has not been reached. The left-wing coalition argues that they has been excluded by the Pinochet-era electoral law, which makes it very difficult for minor parties to win any congressional seats (Ref A). The proposed agreement would run JP candidates on Concertacion congressional lists in districts that would virtually guarantee the election of the JP candidate. This measure would end what has been referred to as the "exclusion" of the extra-parliamentary left from Congress (Ref A).

15. (U) Presidential candidate Eduardo Frei's campaign walks a fine line in its dealings with the far left. He needs their support to

win the presidential elections in a runoff (Ref B). However, the Concertacion parties cannot make too many concessions to JP without generating intra-coalition tensions, particularly with the Christian Democrats (Frei's party), historically enemies of the Communists.

Leftist Parties Unite Under One Presidential Candidate

¶6. (U) On April 25 and 26, the leftist parties held a National Assembly for the Left to discuss the congressional candidates deal proposed by the Concertacion and to elect a single presidential candidate to represent them all. During the assembly, the extra-parliamentary leftist parties chose former Socialist Party leader Jorge Arrate as their single presidential candidate from a panel of three possibilities: Guillermo Teillier (Communist Party), Tomas Hirsch (Humanist Party) and Jorge Arrate (independent). Early in the assembly, Teillier bowed out of the competition, throwing his support behind Arrate saying he believed that in the current political climate of Chile, Arrate would be the best choice for the left. In the subsequent internal election, Arrate won with 81 percent to Hirsch's 19 percent. Arrate is a former Concertacion leader who recently resigned from the Socialist Party to represent the "Allendista" Socialists.

¶7. (U) Jorge Arrate, born in 1941, studied law at the University of Chile and earned an M.A. from Harvard University in 1969. An historical figure of the Socialist Party, he was Executive President of CODELCO in 1971, acting Minister of Mines in 1972 and an Economic Advisor to President Salvador Allende. Arrate lived in exile for 14 years during the Pinochet regime. Upon his return, he was active in the Socialist Party. Arrate served as Minister of Education under the Patricio Aylwin administration in 1992, and was appointed Minister of Labor and Social Security and later Government Spokesman during the Frei administration. He also served as Chile's Ambassador to Argentina from 2000 to 2003.

COMMENT: The Significant Role of Minor Parties

¶8. (SBU) The extra-parliamentary left is expected to pull votes away from Eduardo Frei during the first election round and thus help conservative Sebastian Pinera's presidential bid. The minor party candidates may benefit from a growing sentiment that Frei and Pinera represent old ideas and are out of touch with today's political realities. Arrate and other minor party candidates will not win the presidency but could siphon support from the Concertacion and further fracture its voter base. Nonetheless, it is all but certain that voters for Chile's far left, except the most die-hard, anti-system leftists, would throw their support behind Frei in a second round, explaining why many analysts believe that Pinera must win in the first round if he is to become Chile's next president.
End Comment.